UNCLE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

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By Henry J. Byron

Author of "Our Boys," "Uncle Dick's Darling," "War to the Knife," etc.

PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
1902

CHARACTERS

UNCLE BOOTLE, ...	*Mr. E. Royce*
PAUL BEAUMONT (his nephew), . .	*Mr. Edward Terry*
PETER FLETCHER (his best friend), .	*Mr. J. H. Barnes*
PUFFIN (a Pastrycook's man), ...	*Mr. Crutwell*
MRS. BEAUMONT, ...	*Miss E. Muir*
EMILY MONTROSE, ...	*Miss Eveleen Rayne*
SARAH JANE (a Maid of all Work), ...	*Miss Amalia*

SCENE

Beaumont's Cottage at Sydenham

There is no interval between Acts I and II, and a very short one between Acts II and III.

Gift
Mr. H. L. Moncken
Mar. [illegible]

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UNCLE

Act I

Scene—*Prettily furnished drawing-room or living-room in a cottage ornée a little way out of town. Doors* R. *and* L. *Window* L. C. *Chimney piece* R. *or* R. C. *French windows leading down to garden—the room supposed to be first floor.*

After rise of curtain and slight pause, then Sarah, *the servant maid, rather showily dressed, but in bad taste, enters* R. D.

Sarah. I'm *going*, mum. (*Pause*) I say I'm going, mum. (*Pause*) Missis hears sharp enough when you don't *want* her to. If one has a few minutes' chat with the baker, or waits at the gate whilst the young man from the grocer's pays one a few innocent compliments, she bursts on one like a thunder-storm. Fact is, I daresay she finds some difficulty in getting my month's money together, for these Beaumontses ain't over-burdened, *I* know. I've heard one or two of their squabbles about money. They say walls haves ears, but what's better they haves *doors*, and them doors haves key-holes, or we poor servants would often find our characters took away behind our backs and never know it. Hem! (*Loud*) I'm *going*, mum.

Enter Beaumont.

Beaumont. Going, mum! You're going *it*. What's the matter, Sarah! That's if you *are* Sarah. Upon my word, you domestics dress in such a fashion nowadays it's difficult to tell you from your mistresses.

Sarah. Yes, sir. There's no *law*, I believe, to stand in the way of us servants wearing what we can pay for.

Beaumont. None that I'm aware of. I'm an advocate for letting people do as they please myself.

Sarah. That's what I always say—it's not the masters, it's the missises as does it.

Beaumont. As does *what*, Sarah?

SARAH. Oh! sir, as does everything. As won't let a young woman keep her place if she happens to be good-looking.

BEAUMONT. Ha! that's where you're wrong; it's when she's good-looking she won't keep her place *herself*. Have *you* suffered from that injustice, Sarah?

SARAH. Oh! sir, it's not for *me* to tribute motives to *no* one, but missis is like the rest, I suppose. Missis *says* it's my insolence as parts us, but that's rubbish!

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Well, I'm sorry the girl's going. She *has* a temper, but I'm afraid Teresina does try it. Teresina tries *mine* sometimes; she's the dearest little woman, but prone to suspicion, is Teresina.

Enter MRS. BEAUMONT.

MRS. B. (*aside*) Why is Paul talking to Sarah? (*To* BEAUMONT) I think when you know that young woman has been grossly insolent to *me*, and is now being packed off at a moment's notice, you might show me *some* respect by not noticing her. (*Goes to* SARAH *with money.*)

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) I didn't know anything about it. I know the girl's only been here a couple of months or so, and seemed willing enough, with a fair notion of cooking, too. I suppose for the next week or so it'll be the old story—*chops and a charwoman.* They may well call her a *char*woman, for she cooks 'em to cinders.

MRS. B. (*to* SARAH) There's your money—count it.

SARAH. No needs to do that, mum; *I* can trust you. (*Opens an elaborate porte-monnaie.*)

MRS. B. (*aside to* BEAUMONT) The idea! Only look—fancy a servant with a porte-monnaie like *that.*

BEAUMONT. Well, my love, it's not *my* fault.

MRS. B. No. But I wonder how she could have got it. (*To* SARAH) There's nothing more.

SARAH. No, mum, there ain't. Which wishing you both a good morning. I will take the liberty of sending my Cousing Haugusttus for my box early in the hevenink. (*Exit.*)

MRS. BEAUMONT *turns.* BEAUMONT *and she face to face.*

MRS. B. Well, Paul.

BEAUMONT. Well, my love.

MRS. B. "*Well*, my love"! Is that all you've got to say? A servant insults your wife, is turned away on the instant, and all you can say is, "Well, my love."

BEAUMONT. Since you put it in *that* light, Teresina, I will add—what are we going to do now?

MRS. B. Well, Mrs. Grubbins will—

BEAUMONT. Have we got to fall back on old Mother Grubbins again?

MRS. B. A most respectable woman, Paul. She's not the cook she *might* be.

BEAUMONT. No, she *isn't*. There's one thing that's *economical* about her culinary arrangements, however; we save something in pepper.

MRS. B. How so?

BEAUMONT. Because, my love, she substitutes *snuff*. The powder is equally pungent, and she purchases it *herself*. *I* prefer pepper, myself, but tastes differ.

MRS B. Ah! you always were *partial* to Sarah.

BEAUMONT. I prefer Sarah to *snuff*, certainly.

MRS. B. There'll be no difficulty in supplying her place. You've only got to advertise for a week or so.

BEAUMONT. Yes. But you see spare cash is rather conspicuous by its absence just now. Uncle Bootle's last remittance has miscarried—or possibly he has heard we're—Oh! no, no, don't let me think of anything so horrible as *that!*

MRS. B. What *do* you mean?

BEAUMONT. Never mind. Nothing much. ONLY, that if ever the fatal fact that I have married should—

MRS. B *Fatal* fact, indeed!

BEAUMONT No, no, don't catch up one's words. Don't let's quarrel, Teresina, there's a love. I'm bothered out of my life as it *is*.

MRS. B. I never want to quarrel—you always begin it.

BEAUMONT. Very well, little woman, then let's have a division of labor that shall at once be fair and satisfactory. *I'll* always *begin* the quarrels, *you* shall always end them. Now, let's sit down and look matters in the face. There. (*They sit, good friends*) Do you know that the prospect is anything but agreeable?

MRS. B That's very polite, sir, considering you're looking at *me*

BEAUMONT. No, no. You see, I can't expect to get any business unless I—a—I *show* myself. Unless I mix a bit amongst people who can help me, and who *would*, too.

MRS. B. Unless you join a *club*, you mean. Unless you are always away from home, leaving me here alone with Mrs. Grubbins.

BEAUMONT. There you touch me, Teresina. *I* shouldn't like to be left alone with *her*.

MRS. B. Then you would be always receiving invitations—going out to dinners and suppers, and goodness knows *where*. If your success simply depends on mixing with a parcel of selfish men, most of them bachelors—

BEAUMONT. Ah! there you're quite mistaken. They are *not*, as a rule, bachelors.

MRS. B. Then they're bad men who don't appreciate their homes.

BEAUMONT. There's no arguing with you.

MRS. B. Of course, you regret your freedom.

BEAUMONT. No, but I should like, if I can't see any of my old friends at my old haunts—

MRS. B. (*in temper*) Oh! *go* to your old aunt's, though I never knew you had any.

BEAUMONT. "*Haunts*," Teresina, dear, not "*aunt's*." As I was saying, if I can't see them in *town*, I should like some of them—one or *two* of them, say—to see what a nice little home I've got—what a nice little *wife*.

MRS. B. You've told me all about your bachelor friends. There's only *one* I should ever care to see here—mind you, I don't say I should care to see *him*, but I should say your friend Fletcher was rather more endurable than the others.

BEAUMONT. Eh! Oh! yes. (*Aside*) Now that's most remarkable. With a depth worthy of Plymouth Sound I wrote to Fletcher privately suggesting he should drop in by accident, and—now that's one of these extraordinary—it's because I've always been cracking Fletcher up to her. Hem! Without having ever *seen* Fletcher she evidently takes an interest in Fletcher.

MRS. B. You have always described him as such a very charming person.

BEAUMONT. (*airily*) *Have* I? Oh! ah! well, as to *that*, you know, friends are partial.

MRS. B. He's very handsome, isn't he?

BEAUMONT. Oh! he'd pass in a crowd.

MRS. B. Why, you said he was a perfect Apollo Belvidere.

BEAUMONT. *Did* I? Well, I never saw Apollo. I've been to Belvidere, and don't care about it.

MRS. B. And you said his manners were so fascinating.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Confound 'em, so they are.

MRS. B. Altogether a dangerous sort of person, I should say. (*Goes up.*)

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) *He* won't come. A fellow like Fletcher has something better to do than waste his time (FLETCHER *enters; neither see him*) in a slow place like this. Good

looking—well—a—yes—probably, but I don't think there's anything particularly *striking* about him.

FLETCHER *brings his hand well down on* BEAUMONT'S *back.*

FLETCHER. I say, old boy, it's delightful to find such rural simplicity so near to town. Don't even close your front door. Yours was wide open.

MRS. B. (*aside*) It's that Sarah. The sort of young woman who *would* leave and not shut the door.—Who *is* this gentleman?

BEAUMONT. Well, this *is* a surprise. (*Winks aside to* FLETCHER.) I say a *surprise.*—He—hem!

FLETCHER. Eh, but you wrote that you wished—

BEAUMONT. Hush! You don't quite—(*whispers*)—

MRS. B. (*at back*) What's the matter? I suppose it's one of Paul's creditors. I wonder if it's the landlord. I know he's intending to call.

BEAUMONT. Ha—oh! Teresina dear. Ha! ha! talk of (*awkwardly*)—of the d—— —beg your pardon—I mean—Ha! ha! actually here IS Fletcher. My wife—Fletcher, the original of the photograph.

FLETCHER. Which miserable attempt—I won't call it a work of art—did no justice *whatever* to the original, Mrs. Beaumont. You should really bring an action against the photographer and "subpœna" the sun as an accomplice.

FLETCHER *and* MRS. BEAUMONT *talk aside.*

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) He's quite at home already. Always *was.* Sort of fellow who can hob and nob with a coal-heaver or hold his own with a cabinet minister. (*To him*) Well, Fletcher, this is quite a surprise.

FLETCHER. Yes. I knew you hung out somewhere in this district, and as I had nothing to do for a day or two I set out to hunt you down, run you to earth, in fact, Mrs. Beaumont, to find out where he was concealing himself.

MRS. B. Oh! he prefers this rustic seclusion, don't you, Paul?

BEAUMONT. A—yes—I like seclusion. You've no notion, Fletcher, what nice *walks* we have.

FLETCHER. Ah.

BEAUMONT. Never meet a soul.

FLETCHER. That *is* secluded.

BEAUMONT. And we're never bored with excursionists, or Good Templars, or Odd Fellows, or anything of that kind.

FLETCHER. Rather rollicking altogether, then?

BEAUMONT. (*gloomily*) Quite so.

FLETCHER. And you're contented here?

MRS. B. Why should he *not* be?

FLETCHER. On the contrary, there is every reason why he should be as happy as the days are long.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) And they *are* long. (*Sighs.*) Deuced long.

FLETCHER. Well, now, you know, Mrs. Beaumont, I'm simply astonished at all this.

MRS. B. Indeed, Mr. Fletcher.

Before this all seated.

FLETCHER. To see old Paul here settled down into a regular married man—a prize Benedick—a model husband. Paul, who was as wild a fellow in his way as any young fellow of his time.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) He-hem!

MRS. B. *Was* he though, Mr. Fletcher?

FLETCHER. You should have seen him. Such a fellow to waltz—all night—such a fellow to flirt.

MRS. B. (*becoming annoyed*) *Was* he though? Hem!

FLETCHER. Ha! ha! All the women were mad after him.

MRS. B. INDEED. *Mad*, were they?

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Fletcher *means* well, but he's making it hot for *me.*

FLETCHER. I say, Paul, old man, do you remember Tilly Trotter and the picnic at Lynton Wood?

BEAUMONT. (*with petulance*) No, I don't, and I don't want to.

FLETCHER. You wouldn't recognize the man of those days in the sober and demure party of the present, Mrs. Beaumont.

MRS. B. I've no doubt of *that.* (*Aside*) "Tilly Trotter!" I'll "Tilly Trotter" him, by-and-by. (*Goes up.*)

BEAUMONT. (*brings* FLETCHER *down*) I say, my dear fellow, surely you can see with half an eye—

FLETCHER. No, I can't, nor you either. What do you mean?

BEAUMONT. Let a fellow finish, please. Surely you can see with *two* eyes, we'll say, of which two eyes, by the way, you are absurdly conceited.

FLETCHER. (*with a grin*) I own it, I own it, dear boy.

BEAUMONT. That you're adding to the jealousy and suspicion which are already characteristics of my wife.

FLETCHER. No!

BEAUMONT. Yes.
FLETCHER. I didn't mean it.
BEAUMONT. But you've *done* it.
FLETCHER. Then I'll *undo* it.
BEAUMONT. (*aside*) We've got a good excuse in being without a servant, for his not being asked to stop. But he's one of those fellows who'd rather *prefer* making his own bed; yes, and cooking the dinner, *too*.

Goes up; MRS. BEAUMONT *and* FLETCHER *come down.*

FLETCHER. I assure you *that* was all exaggeration. But I like to chaff old Paul on what were *never* his weak points, because he pretends to think they *were*.
MRS. B. Then he *wasn't* much of a waltzer?
FLETCHER. One round always finished him.
MRS. B. Ha! ha! How good! I can *see* him.
FLETCHER. And his *flirtation* was of so mild a nature that his friends used to watch him in entranced admiration, in which pity and contempt struggled for the mastery, and invariably ran a dead heat.
MRS. B. (*delighted*) Of course—that's what *I* always found it. (*They sit aside.*)
BEAUMONT. (*who has overheard this*) I think of the two I should rather prefer my *previous* description.
MRS. B. And how do you like our little place, Mr. Fletcher?
FLETCHER. I think it's charming.
MRS. B. Wouldn't you think it dull, if you lived here?
FLETCHER. Not if I were *Beaumont.*
MRS. B. I'm afraid you're a very terrible person.
BEAUMONT. (*aside*) So am I.
FLETCHER. I love quiet.
BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Does he! The rackettyest dog in England.
FLETCHER. I could stay at a place like this for—oh! for ever so long.
BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Not if I *know* it, Fletcher. Not if I know it.
MRS. B. There are some charming little villas—quiet little bachelor's boxes, in the neighborhood. I should say one of them would suit a person like you, if you *are* so fond of quiet, and, oh! dear! it would be relief to have a little genial society.
BEAUMONT. He—hem! Ain't *I* a relief, Teresina, my dear? You'll make Fletcher think we're altogether out of the world.

MRS. B. So we are.

FLETCHER. I suppose it's very healthy here?

BEAUMONT. (*hastily*) Not a bit of it. Notoriously the other way.

FLETCHER. Why on earth do you live here?

BEAUMONT. Why? You know it was necessary that I should hide my wife. I mean in its *secretive*, not its physical sense, of course. I married without Uncle Bootle's knowledge. Uncle Bootle is my sole resource. He allows me a small income, he has provided for me in his will; he is old, bedridden, and abroad—

FLETCHER. *That's* a model uncle, if you like.

MRS. B. Yes, but isn't it dreadful to be hidden away like—like—

FLETCHER. A treasure.

BEAUMONT. (*rises and moves aside*) He—hem! I don't think your interpretation in the best taste. I was *explaining*.

FLETCHER. Very sorry—I'm mum.

BEAUMONT. (*with dignity*) Thank you, Fletcher—a—where was I?

FLETCHER. On the sofa.

BEAUMONT. Hem! Thank you, Fletcher. (*Sits*) Uncle Bootle was jilted by my mother, his brother married her under his nose.

FLETCHER. "Married her under his nose"? Then I suppose old Bootles a very tall party.

MRS. B. Ha! Ha! Ha!

BEAUMONT. Fletcher, your interruption is at once ridiculous and ill-timed. Your laughter, Teresina, is unfeeling. Uncle Bootle—who has never seen me since a baby—has for years allowed me a small annual sum.

FLETCHER. Ah, that's because he's never seen you.

BEAUMONT. With the proviso that it should cease on my committing matrimony. I *have* committed matrimony.

FLETCHER. How long is the charitable old lunatic going to last? Do you give him a year?

BEAUMONT. I'd give him *seven* if I was trying him.

FLETCHER. Well, all you've got to do is to make yourselves as jolly as you can under the circumstances—nobody'll ever inform your uncle of your marriage, and—

BEAUMONT. (*shakes hand*) Thank you, Fletcher, thank you, Peter. You alone know my condition. It's a pity you can't stay this evening.

FLETCHER. Who *said* I couldn't stay?

MRS. B. Why, Paul, you've been all along wishing for

Mr. Fletcher to come here. I assure you, Mr. Fletcher, I heard so much about you that I was becoming quite jealous.

FLETCHER. Jealousy, I'm sure, never entered into your disposition.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) That's quite true, for it was born with it.

MRS. B. Well, I *do* think a jealous wife makes herself exceedingly ridiculous.

BEAUMONT. Hear! hear!

FLETCHER. Yes, and a jealous husband is simply a nuisance.

BEAUMONT. But jealousy is more pardonable on the male side.

MRS. B. I don't see that at all.

BEAUMONT. Teresina, my love, Cæsar's wife should be—

FLETCHER. That was a very good argument from Cæsar's point of view. I should liked to have heard Mrs. C.'s opinion on the subject. But about my not staying, Paul. I feel jolly here. Don't cold-shoulder a poor fellow.

BEAUMONT. Unfortunately—most unfortunately—Mrs. Beaumont and the servant have fallen out.

FLETCHER. Didn't hurt themselves, I hope.

BEAUMONT. (*loudly*) I didn't mean out of *window*, Peter Fletcher. To come to the point, we're without a servant.

FLETCHER. All the better. That's why the kind offices of a friend who can cook like Francatelli, and—

MRS. B. Besides, Mrs. Grubbins—a most worthy woman, Mr. Fletcher—is coming by-and-by. And though there's nothing in the house—

BEAUMONT. (*quickly*) There you *are*—there's nothing in the house. Can't ask a man to stay when there's nothing in the *house*.

MRS. B. But, you know, we've often had some very nice things from Pappinger's.

FLETCHER. Pappinger's, Pappinger's — sounds like a place where there *would* be nice things. Confectioner's, I suppose?

BEAUMONT. Yes, tarts and jellies and all *that*.

MRS. B. Yes, and cold fowl, and glazed tongue, and pigeon pies, and no *end* of nice things.

FLETCHER. It makes one's mouth water to look at them.

BEAUMONT. (*to* MRS. BEAUMONT) Can't ask a man to stop on chance of confectioner's roast fowl, some old fossil that's been in the window a week! Glazed tongue, too, equally

ancient, all jelly and grits. Fletcher's accustomed to good living.

FLETCHER. Yes, and I have been ordered to knock off all luxuries. You've made me so hungry with your remarks that I believe I could clear Pappinger's shop, wherever it is. By the way, where *is* Pappinger's? I should like to go there and order round a small banquet. It would be no end of fun. What say, Paul?

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) It would get rid of him for a short time, and I could improve the occasion by speaking seriously to Teresina—who has been, to use a *mild* term, rather "*going* it." (*To* FLETCHER) Well, if you like to *try*.

MRS. B. Yes, but, of course, you wouldn't dream of allowing Mr. *Fletcher* to go and order the things. Put on your hat, dear, and go yourself.

BEAUMONT. Eh?

FLETCHER. Besides, you know the way, and I don't.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) It's rather awkward, considering I'm in Pappinger's debt. Pappinger's pastry and Pappinger's bills are equally heavy. In fact, in going to the station, I have for some time given that respected pastrycook's a wide berth. Made a *détour*, in fact. If the other tradesmen follow Pappinger, I shall have to make something more than a *day-tour*. If Uncle Bootle *should*, by any accident, have heard I— (*Faintly*) Phew! I *mustn't* imagine such an *awful* possibility—I—

FLETCHER. (*claps* BEAUMONT'S *hat on him*) There you are, old man! Don't be long. (*Goes to* MRS. BEAUMONT).

BEAUMONT. (*aside, observing them*) No, I *won't*.

MRS. B. It's a warm day, Paul dear; don't walk too fast; you know it always upsets you.

BEAUMONT. Ha! ha! I won't walk fast. (*Aside*) I'll run like the deuce.

Exit.

MRS. B. And so you and my husband are such very old friends!

FLETCHER. Oh! friends of years.

MRS. B. Do you know, he has spoken so much about you that at last I quite pictured to myself what sort of person you were?

FLETCHER. And of course the reality turns out a disappointment.

MRS. B. Oh! you want me to pay you a compliment.

FLETCHER. Not at all. Only I'm afraid if dear old Paul was always singing my praises, as of course he *was*—

MRS. B. (*aside*) He takes that for granted. Upon my word!

FLETCHER. Why, of course, you know expectations are aroused which (*turning over music*)—you play, of course.

MRS. B. A little.

FLETCHER. And sing, I'm sure.

MRS. B. Slightly.

FLETCHER. How delightful! How I envy Beaumont!

MRS. B. Indeed! A musical wife is not always appreciated. When I sing, as a rule, Paul goes to sleep.

FLETCHER. The Goth! I wonder, now, if you would so far oblige a poor fellow, who is simply a musical enthusiast, who can't afford the opera, and finds the Monday Pops too deep for him—I wonder if you *would* be so charitable as to—to—

MRS. B. Oh! I'm afraid you're a critic.

FLETCHER. Not I, indeed. You have,—I see. *Do* be generous and sing it.

MRS. B. If you *insist*. (*Plays symphony.*)

FLETCHER. If Beaumont sleeps through that sort of thing, his dreams must be delicious.

MRS. B. Ha! ha! How absurd you are!

She sings a love ballad; at its conclusion, or when beginning to repeat it, re-enter BEAUMONT *out of breath; he watches them.*

FLETCHER. A thousand thanks. Voice, style, execution perfect. When I hear such a combination I really feel inclined to remark—

BEAUMONT. (*abruptly and severely*) I've got the grub. The man'll be here directly. I intercepted a pigeon pie that was going to Mrs. McWhopper, and diverted its destiny into *this* direction.

MRS. B. I told you there'd be no difficulty. (*Goes up.*)

BEAUMONT. And I've got a fowl, and I've got a tongue—and I've got a—

FLETCHER. (*reflectively*) *Fowl—tongue.*

BEAUMONT. What do you mean by that, Peter?

FLETCHER. I was merely a re-peater. (*Aside to* BEAUMONT) If I didn't know your eccentricities, Paul, I should look upon you as decidedly cranky to-day.

BEAUMONT. *Cranky?*

FLETCHER. Rather *short.*

BEAUMONT. You don't expect me to *grow* at *my* time of life. (*Aside*) Fletcher always *was* a fool.

MRS. B. I declare, it will be quite like a picnic. We

must do our own waiting, you know. It will be quite fun. And I'm so hungry.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) *I'm* not.

FLETCHER. And I've the appetite of a hunter.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) He always *had*. A hunter! Ha! ha! The *field*.

MRS. B. Paul, my dear, you must come and assist.

FLETCHER. And I too, please.

MRS. B. Come along then, and help me get the knives and forks and things.

Exit, R. D.

FLETCHER. Enchanted.

Follows her; when he is off BEAUMONT *rushes to door to look after them—the following is given disjointedly as he walks about, etc.*

BEAUMONT. Any one more at home I never met. He's horribly good health, too, and likes roughing it. He'll stop. We haven't got a spare room, but he'll suggest the sofa, I'll take my oath. I can't turn him out—at least I—a—don't *think* I can. I don't want to quarrel with him, for I owe him fifty pounds. Besides, I'm *fond* of Fletcher. At least—a—I *used* to be fond of him. But old bachelors get so beastly selfish. He hasn't brought any *bag* or anything with him. Oh! he'll go presently. Of *course* he'll go and—

Enter MRS. BEAUMONT *followed by* FLETCHER. *They carry a table-cloth, knives, forks, castors, etc.*

MRS. B. Paul, what a lazy fellow you are. I couldn't have done without Mr. Fletcher.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) *I* could.

Business of laying cloth, etc. BEAUMONT *looking on biliously.*

MRS. B. Why, Mr. Fletcher, you're quite clever.

BEAUMONT. Yes, might have been born a footman.

FLETCHER. And a very good thing *too*. There's the confectioner's man, Paul.

MRS. B. Just go and open the door, dear?

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Ha! ha! *I'm* chivied about, *I* am.

Exit.

FLETCHER. I'm afraid you've allowed your husband to

lapse into lazy habits. Domestic bliss has made him slothful.

MRS. B. And he always *was* the dearest old dormouse.

FLETCHER. (*aside*) *Was* he though?

Re-enter BEAUMONT *followed by* CONFECTIONER'S MAN *with tray.*

BEAUMONT. Here you are.

MRS. B. That's all right, thank you. I'll take them. (*business*). What a lovely pie.

CONFECTIONER'S MAN. Yes'm, that's a pie as *is* a pie, that *there* pie.

BEAUMONT. Yes, yes, of course.

CONFECTIONER'S MAN. Fowl, mum, tongue, mum, tarts, mum.

FLETCHER. Ha! ha! So you ordered tarts, eh?

BEAUMONT. Yes, I knew your childish tastes.

CONFECTIONER'S MAN. Hanythink further, mum?

MRS. B. Nothing more, thanks.

CONFECTIONER'S MAN. I will call round for the dishes.

Exit.

FLETCHER. (*at door*) Yes, don't hurry; this'll last us a couple of days at least.

BEAUMONT. (*aside, to* MRS. BEAUMONT *severely*) Do you hear *that?*

MRS. B. *No. What?*

BEAUMONT. Yes, I believe you *do* "*know what.*" (*Aside*) If I don't bring matters to a climax—I can see Fletcher's a fixture.

MRS. BEAUMONT *has placed the dishes.*

MRS. B. Now, I call that a picture. Now, Paul, dear, go and fetch the champage.

FLETCHER. Champagne? By Jove, you *are* Sybarites.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) The last of his race. The sole remaining member of the dozen I ordered on coming here.

FLETCHER. Now, wake up, old man, and fetch the fizz.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*). Fetch the fizz. I should like to fetch *his* "phiz." (*action of striking*). What's the worst of it is it's cheap, and he'll find it out.

MRS. B. Oh! *do* go, Paul, dear, don't be an hour.

BEAUMONT. (*aside, almost tearfully*). I AM chivied *about.*

Exit.

MRS. B. It seems quite a shame to destroy the symmetry of that pie, doesn't it?

FLETCHER. Yes—it's quite a work of art. Really your local confectioner is a decided find.

MRS. B. Isn't he? Oh! we're not *quite* outside the pale of civilization, Mr. Fletcher.

Enter quickly BEAUMONT, *with champagne opened.*

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Opened it outside, for he'd be sure to ask to see the cork. Now, I can tell you, Fletcher, this wine is *rather*. That's what it is—rather.

FLETCHER. Sorry for that, I prefer it *quite*.

BEAUMONT. Just so. How ready you are.

FLETCHER. Hope the champagne isn't.

BEAUMONT. Isn't *what?*

FLETCHER. *Reddy*. Gooseberry like, you know. Prefer it light-tawny.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) He'll twig it directly.

MRS. B. Now sit down. Mr. Fletcher says that pie's a work of art.

FLETCHER. Yes, ought to be put under a glass case.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) I know what sort of a glass case he'll put it under.

MRS. BEAUMONT *begins to cut pie and assist.* BEAUMONT *pours out wine into* FLETCHER'S *glass. The glasses have been on the sideboard.*

BEAUMONT. (*genially*) There, Peter, my boy, that's not half a bad glass of wine.

FLETCHER. (*holding it up—it is not full*) Excuse me, Paul, it *is* half a bad glass of wine. Suppose you make it a full one.

BEAUMONT. Beg your pardon. (*Business, fills his own and* MRS. BEAUMONT'S *glass.*)

FLETCHER. Your good health, Mrs. Beaumont. Paul, dear boy, bless you. (*Drinks.*)

MRS. B. I'm sure this is infinitely preferable to the ruined joints and vilely cooked chops and steaks *Sarah* gave us.

FLETCHER. Ha, not a despicable brand by any means.

BEAUMONT. (*getting genial*) Thought you'd like it, old fellow.

FLETCHER. (*aside*) Poison.

BEAUMONT. Ha! ha! This is rather rich after all. I wonder what old Uncle Bootle would say if he were to see us now. Eh, Teresina, my love.

MRS. B. Ha! ha! Paul, what a man you are.

FLETCHER. Yes. Ha! ha! Yes, he always *was*. Don't let's have the skeleton at the banquet.

BEAUMONT. No, no, unless it's that of the fowl when we've finished him.

All laugh. FLETCHER *helps* MRS. BEAUMONT *to wine, etc.*

FLETCHER. I suppose you've no recollection of him.

BEAUMONT. No. Got his miniature on the chimney-piece. Taken some years ago. Hideous *then*—by *this* time, must be revolting.

FLETCHER. Ha! ha! You're severe, Paul. Glass of wine. (*Business, music piano.*)

MRS. B. What a lucky thing it is for poor Paul that the terrible old man's in a far distant land.

BEAUMONT. Well, here's his better health, wherever he is.

About to drink. A loud knocking heard at the door, and a loud ringing. Pause—consternation.

BEAUMONT. (*in a low voice*) Who—who can that be?

MRS. B. What a knock and ring! Oh dear, I feel quite frightened.

FLETCHER. (*goes to window*) It's a cab, or fly. And there's an old gentleman getting out of it. A *little* old gentleman.

BEAUMONT. (*faintly, half staggering to chimney-piece,* R., *and clutching the miniature*) A—a little old gentleman. I don't *know* any little old gentleman. What—what is he like?

FLETCHER. Well, he's not a beauty. In fact, he's plain—indeed, he's ugly.

BEAUMONT. A horrible suspicion over—over—(*looking at miniature*). Has he got a face like parchment? A—a—hook nose? A pair of heavy eyebrows? ? A glance like an eagle? ? ? A bald head? ? ? ?

FLETCHER. A face like parchment, a hook nose, heavy eyebrows, an eagleish expression, and now he takes his hat off, he certainly is as bald as—you've simply described him to the very LETTER.

BEAUMONT. Uncle Bootle.

Collapses on to chair; MRS. BEAUMONT *clasps her hands, looking in dismay at* FLETCHER · *music swells.*

ACT DROP

ACT II

SCENE.—*Same as Act* I. *As the Act drop rises, the stage is vacant.*

FLYMAN. (*heard outside*) Call yourself a gentleman, do you?

BEAUMONT. Hold your insolent tongue, sir.

FLYMAN. I've got just as good a right to speak as I think proper as *you* have, or anybody helse.

UNCLE. You're evidently a very ill-regulated individual. You've got your fare and you'll get no more.

FLYMAN. All right. If you wants to go back to the station don't send for *me*, that's all.

UNCLE. Go along with you, you ill-regulated individual.

Enter BEAUMONT, *followed by* UNCLE BOOTLE.

BEAUMONT. I'm so sorry, my dear sir, you should have been so bothered. Flymen are all ruffians.

UNCLE. Never mind, he didn't *do* me. I can stand anything but being *done*. Well, you're thunderstruck to see me here. So I am myself. Marvelous cure. Legs as right as ninepence.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Nine *pins*, he means.

UNCLE. Let's have a look at you. Ha! don't recall a single feature.

BEAUMONT. No; you haven't seen me since I was an infant.

UNCLE. Perhaps that accounts for it. And how do you think *I* look?

BEAUMONT. Wonderful.

UNCLE. So I am. So I am. What an out-of-the-way hole of a place to live in. What on earth makes you select *this* place, of all others.

BEAUMONT. My dear uncle, quiet—quiet is so essential to study. London's all dissipation, and—and—

UNCLE. So it is, so it is. At least, it used to be when *I* was a young fellow. Ha! ha! and when I *was* a young fellow I *was* one, and no mistake, sir.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) I wonder where my wife and Fletcher have got to?

UNCLE. There's one thing that has pleased me about you, Nephew Paul—you never exceeded your allowance.

BEAUMONT. My dear uncle, I have always studied economy. A simple chop, a glass of humming ale, a crust of bread and cheese have formed my staple—a— (*Sees that* UNCLE BOOTLE *has observed the elegant spread.*)

UNCLE. The deuce they have! This doesn't look like a chop and glass of beer.

BEAUMONT. Eh? No— Ha! ha! Fact is, an old friend of mine's birthday, and—a—

UNCLE. (*sourly*) Bah! Birthday! If people never married there'd be *no* birthdays.

BEAUMONT. (*blankly*) No, I daresay it *would* make a difference. I confess that never struck me before.

UNCLE. Now that it has struck you let the impression be a lasting one. Thank Heaven, when I quit this world I shall have the satisfaction of leaving behind me *one* being whom self-interest will always keep a single man.

BEAUMONT. (*aside, agonizedly*) Why—*why* isn't he bedridden as of yore.

UNCLE. Champagne, as I'm alive!

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) He's much more alive than the champagne was.

UNCLE. (*takes up bottle*) I say, my young spark, this is rather different from what I expected.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) It was just what *I* expected.

UNCLE. I suppose this is an occasional case.

BEAUMONT. It wasn't a *case*, it was only half-a-dozen. Fact is—a—it was a little present from a fellow-student. I don't *drink* champagne *myself*. (*Virtuously*) Give *me* good, sound, humming *ale*.

UNCLE. Rubbish. There's rather too *much* "humming" about that ale of yours. However, let's chat of other matters. I sha'n't be with you long.

BEAUMONT. My dear uncle, I trust you may live for many, many years.

UNCLE. Bosh! I didn't mean *that*. Live! Of course I may. And intend to. I meant I shall only be with you a short time *here*—in this cottage. I'm going to Torquay this afternoon. I believe it's rather a dull sort of—

BEAUMONT. (*enthusiastically*) *Dull!* Torquay? The most lively, lovely, healthy, picturesque, and popular seaside paradise imaginable. Fancy, dear uncle, the rippling waves as they come rolling and tumbling along on—

UNCLE. (*enraged*) Hold your tongue! Waves! Hate 'em! Haven't I just had six weeks of 'em?

BEAUMONT. (*plausibly*) Ah! but *these* are such *different* waves. So gentle, so undulating—

UNCLE. Shut up.

BEAUMONT. (*aside, mildly*) He's a nice old man, uncle.

UNCLE. By the way, Paul, you may as well come *with* me to Torquay. As you say it's so delightful, and you *do* look rather pale—overwork, I suppose—why, a month at the seaside would do you all the good in the world.

BEAUMONT. Well, but, uncle, I—

UNCLE. Not at all, not at all. You'll come? (*Goes up.*)

BEAUMONT. It'll have to come out. How can *I* go to Torquay? And—I wonder where my wife and Fletcher are.

UNCLE. (*turns*) Nice sort of place, this. Half a mind to stay a bit. Healthy here, eh?

BEAUMONT. Well—a— (*Aside*) Now, which would be more awful—to go with him to Torquay or for him to remain here? Either way "madness lies." *Just* so. But madness never lied half as much as *I* shall have to do.

UNCLE. Now, go and get some things ready. A bachelor like *you* won't care for an outfit. By Jove! sir, we'll have a jolly month of it.

BEAUMONT. Yes—a—the fact is, uncle, I have accepted an invitation to an old school-fellow's in Yorkshire, and the day after to-morrow I am due at his house. I can't get out of it, and—

UNCLE. (*keenly*) Ha! Has he got any sisters?

BEAUMONT. Nothing of the kind.

UNCLE. Very good. Then of course you can *go*. *For*—(*bringing* BEAUMONT *down seriously*)—my dear Paul, it would *grieve* me to have to turn you adrift. Now be honest with me. You don't think of any such madness as—

BEAUMONT. Marrying? Why should I?

UNCLE. And, on your honor, you're not engaged?

BEAUMONT. Certainly *not*.

UNCLE. No inclination that way?

BEAUMONT. Not the slightest.

UNCLE. (*shaking hands*) Then, my boy, you may consider yourself a wealthy man. It's only a question of time. Now, if you'll allow me, I'll just go up-stairs and have a wash. I'm all dust. Is *that* your room? Thank you. Don't *you* bother to come.

Exit L. D.

BEAUMONT. (*alone*) Five minutes longer and I should have fainted. What's to be done—what's to be—

Enter MRS. BEAUMONT *and* FLETCHER, *quickly*.

BOTH. (*in undertone, hastily*) Well, well?

BEAUMONT. He's gone up-stairs; he'll be down again directly, and I'm a ruined man.

FLETCHER. Is he going to stop?

BEAUMONT. No. He's going to Torquay, presently.

MRS. B. Well, all I have to do is to keep out of his way.

FLETCHER. Certainly. Let us conceal ourselves.

BEAUMONT. What have *you* got to do with it? It wouldn't signify Uncle Bootle seeing *you*.

MRS. B. Oh! Paul dear, why not confess all and fling yourself on his heart?

BEAUMONT. Because I should upset him—knock him over.

FLETCHER. Suppose *I* play the "go between," and negotiate.

BEAUMONT. Madness. Once he discovers I'm married, and I'm a pauper.

MRS. B. But he hasn't discovered it *yet*, Paul, dear, and if he's going away presently, there's no reason he *should*.

BEAUMONT. Just so. But don't you think it advisable you should both—

UNCLE BOOTLE *enters*. FLETCHER *seeing* BOOTLE *behind* BEAUMONT, *signifies to him the fact by what he supposes to be expressive pantomimic action.*

BEAUMONT. I say—you should both (*pause, business*) What's the matter, old fellow?

UNCLE. Paul, has your friend got St. Vitus's dance?

BEAUMONT. (*aside—in dismay*) Oh! lor!

UNCLE. Gracious me. *A lady!*

BEAUMONT. (*blankly*) Eh? A what?

UNCLE. (*blandly*) A *lady*, Paul.

BEAUMONT. Ah—yes—of course. Dear *me*.

UNCLE. This gentleman's—

BEAUMONT. (*with a burst*) WIFE—certainly. Allow me, uncle. Mr. and—hem!—Mrs. Fletcher. Old friends of mine—old—a— (*Wanders up the room, quite overcome.*)

UNCLE. (*politely*) Fletcher—Fletcher. Any relation to Phineas Fletcher, some time since—forty years ago or so—in the India House?

FLETCHER. A distant relation, I believe, Mr. Bootle.

UNCLE. (*shakes hands*) Happy to know you, sir. (*To* MRS. BEAUMONT) Madame, this is indeed a surprise. (*Bows. Aside*) Devilish fine young woman that. (*Aside to* BEAUMONT) By Jove, sir, if you'd fallen a victim to something like what your friend Fletcher—

BEAUMONT. (*eagerly*) You'd have forgiven me if I'd—

UNCLE. Married? Not a bit of it. But I shouldn't have felt surprised. I should have sympathized with you, pitied you, and—

BEAUMONT. (*eagerly*) Yes, uncle!

UNCLE. (*drily*) Cut you off with a shilling. (*Turns aside and joins* MRS. BEAUMONT; *they converse.*)

FLETCHER. (*aside to* BEAUMONT) Paul, my dear fellow, that sudden idea was inspiration. All we've got to do now is to keep up the deception. Rely on *me.* (*Grasps his hand.*)

BEAUMONT. (*blankly*) Thank you, Peter; you—a—you always *were* a true friend.

FLETCHER. So long as there's a shadow of danger I'll never leave you. (*Wrings his hand.*)

BEAUMONT. Thank you. (*They go up*; UNCLE *and* MRS. BEAUMONT *come down.*)

UNCLE. Your husband and my nephew very old friends, eh?

MRS. B. Oh! yes! school-fellows.

UNCLE. Ha—now—a—*you* know all about Paul, of course, from your husband. Husbands always tell their wives everything; it's one of the results of an atrocious system—a—I suppose all those reports that reached me about your husband's friend were fabrications. I can talk to *you* I see; you're a young lady of sense.

MRS. B. Reports? What reports?

UNCLE. As to what a sad dog he was with *your* sex.

MRS. B. (*a little overcome*) No, indeed—*indeed,* no. How long ago was *that?*

UNCLE. Oh! a year or so. Some kind friends of his since gone abroad, wrote me that he was—that he'd been engaged to a young person in a restaurant, and jilted her.

MRS. B. What, Paul—I mean Mr. Beaumont—*my*—

UNCLE. Your *what?*

MRS. B. My *gracious!*

BEAUMONT. (*up to* FLETCHER) The old fellow seems to be getting on all right with the wife.

FLETCHER. Oh! everybody who meets *her* MUST be fascinated.

BEAUMONT. He-hem! (*Moves aside.*)

UNCLE. But I heard worse things than *that.*

MRS. B. Worse! What *could* be worse?

UNCLE. My dear, you don't know what men are.

MRS. B. (*aside*) If I find Paul was a monster before his marriage—I'll—I don't know what I *won't* do.

UNCLE. I heard also that the brother of a young lady at

Twickenham had a violent interview with him, resulting in a severe assault, which took the form of kicks. These, I heard, my nephew pocketed.

MRS. B. Pocketed the—how *could* he?

FLETCHER. (*down*) Well, Mr. Bootle, I'm sorry I shall not have a speedy opportunity of renewing our acquaintance. I hear you are booked for that exquisite spot, Torquay.

BEAUMONT. Loveliest place in the three kingdoms.

UNCLE. (*aside*) They seem rather *anxious* about Torquay. Bootle, my boy, you haven't come all the way from Hyderabad to be *done*. The politeness here's a little *oppressive*. He-hem! (*Moves aside.*)

BEAUMONT. (*to* MRS. BEAUMONT, *aside*) Teresina, my angel, the necessity for this miserable subterfuge will soon be over, I—

MRS. B. (*with restrained temper, to him*) The girl at the restaurant!

BEAUMONT. Eh?

MRS. B. The Twickenham brother! (*Goes aside to* UNCLE.)

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) That four-and-sixpenny champagne's too much for Teresina.

UNCLE. (*to* MRS. BEAUMONT) As I was determined to find out the truth, partly for pleasure—partly for business—but principally to see for myself if the reports of Paul were true, I came to England. Once an invalid, I'm all right again now. I soon get used up, though. I feel over-tired already. (*Yawns and sinks into a chair.*)

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) If he's going to settle to sleep it's all up with us.

FLETCHER. (*to* BEAUMONT, *aside*) The best thing for *us* to do is to clear out for a bit. I'm so afraid your wife may forget her new position.

BEAUMONT. Oh! I don't think there's any fear of *that*.

FLETCHER. Now, as Paul and his uncle have no doubt plenty to talk about, I think, my dear, we'll leave them together a bit. (MRS. BEAUMONT *and he prepare to go.*)

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) He "my dear's" her as if he'd done it *before*. (UNCLE BOOTLE *is settling for a nap.*)

MRS. B. (*to* FLETCHER) Oh! yes, you're quite right. And possibly he may wish to explain to his uncle about the *kicks*.

BEAUMONT. About the *what?*

MRS. B. (*severely*) The well-merited, well-delivered, and unavenged *kicks*. Come, Peter. (*They exit.*)

BEAUMONT. (*blankly*) *Kicks!* I wonder if lunacy runs

in Teresina's family. I believe her father was sane, and her mother's a mass of maternal intellect. Perhaps she'd a rabid grandparent. "Come, Peter." Peter's him. I'm afraid I shall have to *assault Peter*. I've half a mind to throw myself on my uncle's generosity. I'm sure he's got a good heart. He's so deuced ugly, he must have a good heart. I—I'll test it. (*Strikes an attitude of humility.*) Uncle,—best, most generous, most forgiving and most revered of uncles, listen to the—(UNCLE BOOTLE *gives a long and decided snore. Pause.*) At the outset that's a little *chilling*. Hem! (*Loudly*) Uncle! (UNCLE BOOTLE *snores louder, as if half waking.*) "Now could I kill him, pat!" I think it would be as well, as the poet says, to leave him alone in his glory. (UNCLE BOOTLE *gives another snore.*) Or rather his *snorey*. If I remained, I *might* be tempted to do him a mischief. That bald head *does* look so inviting. I—a—I—rather— (UNCLE BOOTLE *gives an enormous snore.*)

BEAUMONT. Oh! law! (*Exit quickly.*)

UNCLE. (*in his sleep*) Take my advice—a—a—three per cents—three per cents—small interest but easy conscience—a—a (*gurgles*)—Bah!

Enter at French window EMILY MONTROSE.

EMILY. Hem! (*Pause.*) A-hem! (*Comes in.*) No one here. The front door bell broken and the side entrance open. What very honest people there must be about here. Hem! Surely this is the house Mr. Lapwing, the agent, said was to let furnished for the summer. Aunt Nabbs says it is, and Aunt Nabbs is always right. Where is the landlady, or owner, or whatever she is? (*Sees remains of luncheon.*) They've been dining early. Shouldn't wonder if they'd gone to sleep. (UNCLE BOOTLE *snores gently.*) They *have*. Wherever did that sound proceed from? Why, I declare—(*goes on tiptoe to chair where* UNCLE BOOTLE *is*)—it's actually a—

UNCLE. (*wakes up suddenly and looks round with his handkerchief over his head*) Halloa!

EMILY. (*with a slight shriek, goes to* R.) Oh! if you please, I didn't mean to.

UNCLE. Was that a fly?

EMILY. (*kindly*) No, sir; a female.

UNCLE. A *what?*

EMILY. A lady.

UNCLE. (*grinning*) It's that wicked Mrs. Fletcher been trying to win a pair of gloves. Where *are* my glasses?

EMILY. (*aside*) What a plain little old man! I wonder if he's the owner of the house. I hope it won't suit Aunt Nabbs, for I'm sure I should be haunted with the recollection of the proprietor. I should be afraid of going up-stairs in the dark for fear of meeting his ghost. I'm terribly frightened. I never saw a real, live ogre, but I'm sure they're like *him*. How he rolls his eyes, and how wild he looks!

UNCLE. Confound those glasses! I *had* glasses.

EMILY. (*aside*) I believe he's had *several*.

UNCLE. I'm afraid to move about, for I'm sure to fall over something.

EMILY. Oh! if you please, I'm sorry to disturb you.

UNCLE. (*aside*) Voice seems more *gentle* than it was.

EMILY. Do I understand this house is to let?

UNCLE. Eh? (*Aside*) Oh! I see. She and Fletcher'd like to stop here. Of course, Paul considers *I* represent everything *now*. If it *is*, my dear—ha! ha! I *will* say you're early in the field as an applicant.

EMILY. "My *dear*"! The familiarity of the plain old man!

UNCLE. Nothing like taking time by the forelock.

EMILY. (*aside*) I wonder time hasn't taken him by the forelock. Oh! I see, he hasn't got one.

UNCLE. (*aside*) If I don't find 'em I'm grounded, and I don't care about *all* the world knowing I'm as—

EMILY. Not that *I* care for the house, but it might suit my aunt.

UNCLE. Your who?

EMILY. My aunt, Mrs. Nicholas Nabbs, of The Nasturtiums, Norwood.

UNCLE. My dear young lady, take the advice of one who's seen rather more than *you* have. Never have your relations to live with you.

EMILY. But my aunt always *has* lived with me. I am entirely dependent on her.

UNCLE. (*aside*) Ah! There *is* a sort of idle, happy-go-lucky air about the fellow. Don't suppose *he* does much for a living. Comes down here, sees a place that suits, sets his wife on to pump *me*. Aunt Nabbs indeed! Ha! ha! The innocent *manner* she assumes, too! (*Loudly*) Ha! woman! woman! what a swindle you are!

EMILY. What? (*Aside*) Not only a very *plain* old man, but he's a very *insolent* old man. The idea of calling me a woman! I should like to hear him call Aunt *Nabbs* one. I'll go back and *send* her to tackle him. (*Aloud*) As you don't appear willing, or indeed *capable* of giving me any information, I won't trouble you any further.

UNCLE. Don't be huffy, don't be huffy, my dear Mrs. Fletcher.

EMILY. (*with a smothered half-shriek, falls back a step or two*) Mrs. ——! (*Pause*) What do you say?

UNCLE. (*aside*) Ah! *that's more* in her old style. Little woman of spirit—objects to the "*my dear.*" Well, then, *plain* "Mrs. Fletcher."

EMILY. (*aside*) Can I believe my ears? How is it possible that this dreadful old man can have—oh! it's too ridiculous —it's— (*She sees something through the window that causes her to shriek and stagger back.* UNCLE BOOTLE *starts, alarmed.*)

UNCLE. My dear madam, what on earth—

EMILY. Oh! don't speak to me. Ah! let me—let me— (*Staggers out.*)

UNCLE. I couldn't catch what she said. Bah! Women are such hysterical, uncertain creatures. I hope Paul will be favored with a few exhibitions of his friend's wife's vagaries. It'll do him good, and convince him more than— Why, *here* they are, confound them! (*discovers his glasses.*) As Macbeth very nearly said. "Why so being" *found.* Ha! ha! I'm a man again.

Enter FLETCHER.

FLETCHER. (*aside*) I suppose Beaumont and his wife are concocting further plans, for she didn't remain with *me* for a moment.

UNCLE. I hope she's better, Mr. Fletcher.

FLETCHER. Eh? Anything the matter with her?

UNCLE. I don't know. She's only just now gone out, with a shriek like the Scotch express.

FLETCHER. (*aside*) Poor Mrs. Beaumont! This excitement has no doubt upset her. Of course, too, Paul's been blowing her up about *me.* It's not *my* fault if I happen to fascinate. Nature's done a good deal *for* me, my tailor's backed up nature, and if I'm dangerous it isn't *my* fault.

UNCLE. (*aside*) I'll tackle him about her applying for the house. You'll excuse *me*, Mr. Fletcher, but considering everything, I put it to *you*—do you—hem!—*do* you think this *quite* the thing, *eh?*

FLETCHER. (*aside*) What's he mean?

UNCLE. It's anything but good taste on *your* part, but I don't hold the *lady* free from the charge of deception.

FLETCHER. (*astonished*) You'll excuse me—a—

UNCLE. *You'll* excuse *me*, but it's fishy, sir—that's what it is, *fishy.*

FLETCHER. (*aside*) She's confessed.

UNCLE. When I say she's to blame, I know well that a wife is to a certain extent under her husband's influence. It's part of the abominable arrangement.

Enter BEAUMONT *at back; pauses.*

FLETCHER. Believe me, my dear sir, the notion was not mine. But this is a great relief, and I'm only too delighted that now you see everything. As you now know all, I hope you'll acquit *me* of—

UNCLE. (*aside*) Dreadful snob this. Wants to shift all the blame to his wife. (*To him*) I don't suppose my opinion one way or the other would signify to *you*. (*Aside*) I'll just go and take a stroll in the garden. There's something about this fellow I can't put up with, and he's so abominably good looking. Very much what *I* was about his age. (*Exit.*)

FLETCHER. (*aside*) He doesn't seem half as enraged as one fancied he *would* be. Poor little woman, I don't wonder at her breaking down. I don't wonder at her—(*as he turns, finds* BEAUMONT, *pallid with suppressed rage, by his side*)—halloa, Paul.

BEAUMONT. Don't "Paul" me sir! Traitor! Snake in the grass! Paltry, perfidious Peter! "Peter." Never again! False, fascinating, but fallacious Fletcher!

FLETCHER. Don't make a fool of yourself, Beaumont!

BEAUMONT. (*with polite sarcasm*) No, sir, you saved me that trouble.

FLETCHER. Pardon me, don't give *me* credit for what is really due to NATURE.

BEAUMONT. Now, I daresay you think that *smart*.

FLETCHER. I *do*, and you *feel* it.

BEAUMONT. Ha! ha! You're a *wit, you* are.

FLETCHER. Not *my* fault—we can't be *all* dull.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) If I wasn't morally certain he'd hit me back again, I'd strike him. I once had an encounter with him at school. I bear the marks still. Hem! I will restrain myself.

FLETCHER. What on earth are you angry with *me* about?

BEAUMONT. What? Fortunately I have ears.

FLETCHER. You have. And thoroughly are those ears developed.

BEAUMONT. Hem! *Some* people have noses.

FLETCHER. *Most* people.

BEAUMONT. Which are occasionally *pulled*.

FLETCHER. By *other* people.

BEAUMONT. Why, of course, you miserable idiot, nobody pulls his own. (*Slight pause.*)

FLETCHER. (*determinedly*) I believe you remarked "miserable idiot."

BEAUMONT. I believe I did.

FLETCHER. Meaning *me.*

BEAUMONT. Well—a—

FLETCHER. I say, was it meant for *me?*

BEAUMONT. Oh! whoever the cap fits can wear it.

FLETCHER. Were it—I mean *was* it intended for *me?*

BEAUMONT. Peter Fletcher—(*seizes his hand*)—we have been friends almost from childhood.

FLETCHER. Bosh! (*Takes his hand back.*)

BEAUMONT. We have grown up into riper years, almost constant companions. You come to see me. You partake of my pigeon pie.

FLETCHER. Pappinger's.

BEAUMONT. You partake of my Pappinger's pigeon pie. You have so upset me, I don't know what I am saying.

FLETCHER. I don't suppose you do.

BEAUMONT. Ungenerous Fletcher! Knowing the fatal effect of my marriage being known to Uncle Bootle—to the one sole relative on whom I depend for *everything*—you—you—(*overcome*)—oh! Peter—for the *last* time, *Peter*, you have ruined me. (*Sinks into chair.*)

FLETCHER. Have you been taking any more of that revolting, so-called, champagne?

BEAUMONT. (*aside, faintly*) I knew he'd find it out.

FLETCHER. Eh? Paul, confess.

BEAUMONT. Anyway, you helped to put it out of sight.

FLETCHER. And it helped to put *you* "out of mind." What's the matter?

BEAUMONT. Ha! ha! You go and tell Uncle Bootle I'm married—explain the wretched expedient I've resorted to—and you ask me "What's the matter."

FLETCHER. I told your uncle nothing.

BEAUMONT. (*sneeringly*) Oh! indeed.

FLETCHER. And as you talk about caps being worn by those they fit, let Mrs. Beaumont wear this *particular* one.

BEAUMONT. Mrs. Beaumont doesn't *wear* caps, sir. Mrs. Beaumont is a lady incapable of—

FLETCHER. Wearing caps?

BEAUMONT. No, Fletcher. Mrs. Beaumont would wear anything *I* wished her. If I desired it Mrs. Beaumont would wear a—a suit of *mail.*

FLETCHER. Mail, no doubt. Regarding dress, her views are decidedly masculine.

BEAUMONT. Masculine, sir.

FLETCHER. And a good thing, too. Many women dress so vulgarly. It's much better her taste should tend rather to *Maskeline* than *Cook*.

BEAUMONT. Miserable quibble. Do you know Dr. Johnson's definition of a punster, Mr. Fletcher?

FLETCHER. Would you like to hear *my* definition of *Dr. Johnson?*

BEAUMONT. Yes.

FLETCHER. Then you sha'n't.

BEAUMONT. All this is subterfuge. What did you mean about Mrs. Beaumont and the cap?

FLETCHER. Simply that *she*—not *I*—confessed the conspiracy to your uncle.

BEAUMONT. (*staggered*) She! Teresina!

FLETCHER. Teresina.

BEAUMONT. (*enraged*) *Don't* call my wife Teresina, Peter Fletcher.

FLETCHER. But her *name's* Teresina, Paul Beaumont, and I repeat that *she* has confessed everything to your uncle. He has just now told me so—at least, now I come to think of it, he didn't exactly *tell* me so, but he said enough to—*I* see, Teresina—I—

Enter MRS. BEAUMONT.

BEAUMONT. So, madam, you have capped your mysterious behavior. You have put a climax to conduct that included remarks about a restaurant and observations about *kicks*. Your unaccountable course of action has culminated, I say, in a confession—a confession that dooms me to a pauper's fate. (*Sinking on chair.*)

MRS. B. (*to* FLETCHER) Don't you think you'd better fetch a doctor? He's—

BEAUMONT. (*starting up*) Don't you attempt it. Teresina Beaumont, *you* have sealed my doom. You have told Uncle Bootle we are married. You have exposed the swindle. You have—

MRS. B. (*firing up*) Who says so—*tell* me who says so?

BEAUMONT. Fletcher. (*With intention, aside to her*) Your new, but evidently intensely appreciated acquaintance—Fletcher.

MRS. B. (*to* FLETCHER) Did *you* say *I* had—

FLETCHER. (*aside*) Once out of this house, I shall con-

sider myself lucky. I'm so muddled that really I couldn't vow he—but it sounded so deuced like it.

MRS. B. Why don't you reply?

BEAUMONT. Yes, why don't you *reply?* You're ready enough to make assertions. (*Blusteringly*) Why don't you back 'em *up*, eh?

FLETCHER. (*aside*) I'd better get out of this. I'll leave it to old Bootle. (*To* BEAUMONT) Well, you know the most sensible of us *some*times make a—

MRS. B. (*triumphantly, but with malice, to* BEAUMONT) *There!* Ha! ha! (*Aside*) He shall smart for this.

FLETCHER. I repeat, the most sensible of us *may* make a mistake.

BEAUMONT. (*blusteringly*) Certainly, the most *sensible* may, but you don't class *yourself* in that category.

FLETCHER. (*threateningly*) Mr. Beaumont, if your wife were not present I'd—

MRS. B. Mr. Fletcher, don't deign to touch him. (*To* BEAUMONT) Since you have chosen to bring this *false* accusation against me, you shall not have cause to repeat it. Whilst your uncle remains there shall be no doubt on his mind that we are Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher.

Enter UNCLE BOOTLE.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) I foresee a fleeting future in Hanwell.

UNCLE. Now, my dear Mrs. Fletcher, I do hope you—

BEAUMONT. (*to him*) Mrs. Fletcher!

EMILY *enters at back.*

MRS. B. Why not, Mr. Beaumont?

UNCLE. (*turning to him*) Yes, why not, Mr. Beaumont?

EMILY. (*aside*) Fickle, false, heartless, base, and abominable traitor! THIS was what he called sketching in Wales!

MRS. B. (*to* FLETCHER) Your friend seems to have some doubt upon the subject. As if we hadn't been *married* THESE THREE MONTHS, LOVE!

FLETCHER. Of course, darl—

EMILY *gives a wailing shriek and falls into* UNCLE'S *arms.* UNCLE *turns, thunderstruck.* FLETCHER *stands transfixed, and* BEAUMONT, *with a slight shriek in imitation of* EMILY'S, *collapses into* UNCLE'S *other arm.* UNCLE *turns to him, thunderstruck.*

PICTURE

ACT DROP

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same as Acts* I *and* II. *Lamps lighted, curtains drawn.* FLETCHER *and* EMILY *discovered; they are both walking up and down the room at opposite sides.*

EMILY. Well, sir?

FLETCHER. Well, Emily.

EMILY. "Emily"—*pah!*

FLETCHER. Why Emily Parr? You haven't changed your name, surely?

EMILY. *I!* That comes well from *you.* No, sir. *I* am not a false and perfidious impostor.

FLETCHER. That I'm sure of.

EMILY. Now, that at last we are alone, what I demand is an explanation.

FLETCHER. I would have explained before, but you wouldn't *let* me.

EMILY. Because of course you can't.

FLETCHER. Then why don't you ask me?

EMILY. Because you *must.*

FLETCHER. Eh?

EMILY. And *shall.*

FLETCHER. And will.

EMILY. Eh?

FLETCHER. If you'll permit me.

EMILY. You haven't written to me for more than a month.

FLETCHER. Admitted.

EMILY. For your own reasons, of course. Possibly you object to the victim of your artful wiles being in possession of written documents.

FLETCHER. I don't understand you.

EMILY. You will; you'll find I've a spirit; that Aunt Nabbs has a spirit.

FLETCHER. (*aside*) She *has*, and occasionally partakes of it.

EMILY. I come by accident to this cottage.

FLETCHER. So do I.

EMILY. Yes, you'd have never come had you expected to meet *me* here.

FLETCHER. On the contrary, that's just what would have induced me to do so.

EMILY. Don't put me out!

FLETCHER. I can't, my love, it's not *my* house.

EMILY. "My love!" You presume, with a *wife* on the premises, to call *me*, "my love"! Why don't you blush to the roots of your hair? No other kind of blush will meet the case—(*melodramatically*) it must be a blush to the roots of your hair.

FLETCHER. I assure you I haven't any—any—

EMILY. Any *roots?*

FLETCHER. No. Anything to blush for.

EMILY. What! I ask you if there isn't a wife on the premises. Answer that.

FLETCHER. I *do* answer that. There *is* a wife on the premises. *I* couldn't help it.

EMILY. Oh! you couldn't *help* it. Your behavior is as unaccountable as it is unmanly. You deceive me heartlessly (*half crying*) and you coolly say "you—you—c—couldn't help it."—(*Sinks in tears on sofa.*)

FLETCHER. (*affected*) Emily—*Emily!*

EMILY. (*in same tone as before*) And you don't blush to the roots of your hair.

FLETCHER. Emily—believe me, if I've done wrong I'll turn crimson to the soles of my boots. You won't hear me.

EMILY. (*sitting up*) I have heard too much—*seen* too much. (*Rising*) But Aunt Nabbs shall know all. (*Crosses to* L.)

FLETCHER. Why will you persistently fling your aunt in my teeth?

EMILY. You have flung your *wife* in *mine.*

FLETCHER. You'll excuse *me*, but—

EMILY. No. I won't—I have your letters—a boxful of them, and if you think conduct such as yours can pass unpunished and unexposed, you are mightily mistaken.

FLETCHER. A woman who brings a breach of promise action is—is—

EMILY. Perfectly right. "If," as Shakespeare says, "it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge."

FLETCHER. You'll excuse *me*, but there'll be the counsel who'll have to be *fee'd* as well. Do you know what the costs of that sort of thing come to?

EMILY. What does it matter? *You'll* have to pay them. You *must* lose.

FLETCHER. Yes, if you prove your case.

EMILY. Which I can.

FLETCHER. Which you can't.

EMILY. Not after what I've seen and heard?

FLETCHER. No—not even after *that.*

EMILY. Then there's no such thing as *evidence.*

FLETCHER. No—not in *your* case.

EMILY. There's the evidence of my senses.

FLETCHER. Yes. You can't very well put your senses in the witness box.

EMILY. I tell you what it is, Peter.

FLETCHER. That's right. I'm glad you call me Peter once again. (*Sings*) "Pee-eeter once again!"

EMILY. Yes, sir; BUT only ONCE. I tell you *what,* you treat this terrible business with such levity that I am at a loss to understand you. You *may* have been false, but I could never have believed you would have been heartless.

Turns aside.

FLETCHER. No, nobody ever said I was *that.* Here have I been waiting to *explain.*

EMILY. And here have *I* been, *hardly opening my mouth and saying a word.*

FLETCHER. He-hem!

EMILY. Waiting *for* an explanation—and—

FLETCHER. Yes!

EMILY. (*severely*) With the perfect knowledge that *no* explanation is possible.

FLETCHER. Now suppose I tell you a little story.

EMILY. Do. After so many *big* ones it'll be a novelty.

FLETCHER. Suppose I find an old friend in a scrape. Married in secret, unknown to the uncle on whom everything depends, and which uncle turning up unexpectedly it is found advisable to hoodwink by pretending the lady is *my* wife till the uncle's—

EMILY. Then why, tell me *why,* Peter Fletcher, you didn't explain all this before.

FLETCHER. You wouldn't allow me.

EMILY. You men always make such a mystery of everything.

FLETCHER. Come, Emily, you *must* see you've misjudged me. Make it up. (*Close by her, places his arm around her.*)

EMILY. Ah! it's all very well, but you don't know how very terrible it seemed.

FLETCHER. (*affectionately*) *Make* it up.

EMILY. (*softened*) Really, I—a—

FLETCHER. And I'll forgive you.

EMILY. (*indignantly*) What!

FLETCHER. I mean we'll forgive each other.

EMILY. (*melting*) Peter, you were always so persuasive.

FLETCHER. Emily, most bewitching of— (*Embraces her; as they do so* UNCLE BOOTLE *enters abruptly, pauses, puts on his glasses. They don't observe him.*)

FLETCHER. (*preparing to go out with* EMILY) And now let me explain how it was my letters didn't reach you. What a neglectful ruffian you must have thought me!

EMILY. I *did*, dearest Peter. But, pray, don't let us come across that old Uncle *Brutal*, or whatever his name is.

They exit affectionately.

UNCLE. Well, that's a pretty sort of a scoundrel, that is! And the young woman—she's a nice piece of goods. *Uncle Brutal!* Evidently an old flame of hers. Poor, dear, deceived, and ill-treated Mrs. Fletcher must know of this. Ha! ha! This is all a glorious example for Paul. I should think *this* will RATHER confirm my theory.

Enter MRS. BEAUMONT.

MRS. B. (*aside*) I suppose by this time Paul has confessed all. He *said* he would immediately, and appeal to his uncle's generosity.

UNCLE. Well, my dear madam, your husband's a pretty vagabond.

MRS. B. (*aside*) He knows all. Poor, dear Paul!

UNCLE. I regret to have to say it, madam, but your husband is a deceiver and a scamp.

MRS. B. (*passionately*) O Mr. Bootle! do, *do* forgive him. He—*he couldn't help it.*

UNCLE. (*blankly*) Oh! a—he couldn't *help* it, couldn't he?

MRS B. Pray, pray don't be severe with him. Think of the frailty of human nature. Oh! pardon him for *my* sake, dear Mr. Bootle!

UNCLE. (*aside*) This is the most remarkable young woman I ever heard of.

MRS. B. And *I* was as much to blame. *More* to blame.

UNCLE. Well, I think you *were* rather weak-minded to let her enter the house, to come after him under your very nose.

MRS. B. (*aside*) The shock's shaken his senses. I *told* Paul not to be abrupt.

UNCLE. But that's no excuse for the way he went on with her.

MRS. B. *Who* went on with *whom?*

UNCLE. Your husband, of couse. If you'd been here a minute sooner you'd have seen it yourself.

MRS. B. (*aside*) A horrible suspicion overcomes me. Can that young lady—

UNCLE. Young fiddlesticks! Considering he's a married man, her behavior was simply atrocious.

MRS. B. I *thought* the story of inquiring about the house was suspicious. (*To him*) You're sure you were not mistaken?

UNCLE. Not a bit of it. They took care there should be no mistake about it.

MRS. B. What did he do?

UNCLE. What *didn't* he do?

MRS. B. Did he—a—(*indicating an embrace*).

UNCLE. Very much so.

MRS. B. (*crossing*) I'll never see him again!

UNCLE. Quite right.

MRS. B. I'll have a separation!

UNCLE. So you shall.

MRS. B. And that *person* shall not remain another moment in *my* house.

UNCLE. (*aside*) *Her* house. Makes up her mind she's *got* it. A fine *spirited* little woman this.

MRS. B. Stay! It will be more dignified to leave *him*. I *will*. I'll go and write him a letter—a letter that shall wring his very soul.

UNCLE. Do so; and when you've done wringing his very soul ring the bell and I'll give it to him.

MRS. B. (*tearfully*) And we might have been so happy. We *were* so happy, except—except—when he put me out. And now to have to go back to *mamma!*

UNCLE. Awful! awful!

MRS. B. (*turning on him*) Not at *all!* How dare you call going back to mamma awful? Don't *pity* me, don't *sympathize* with me! Don't *speak* to me! Don't—a—oh!

Pushes him aside and exit. UNCLE BOOTLE *staggers back on to sofa.*

UNCLE. That's a very nice woman. Strong, too. I was jilted in early life by very much the same sort of superior article. Ha! ha! ha! But they don't do it *now*. Not if you know it, eh, Barnaby Bootle, old boy? (*Goes up.*)

Enter SARAH.

SARAH. What a lucky thing as I took away one of the door keys by mistake this morning. I lets myself in with

Cousing Haugustus, as is out of work, on strike, and enjoying hisself quite quiet and comfortable. Shouldn't wonder if they was all out. Gone to the play, no wonder, so me and Haugustus can have our lobster down-stairs quite pleasant. (UNCLE BOOTLE *is examining the ornaments on the chimney-piece, turning them upside down, etc.*) Oh! lor, who's that? What a grubby-looking little old man! Leastways, to judge by his back. Counting the ornaments, too. Well, if I didn't always *say* it'd come to this. Any one who'd taken in the rude messages from the tradesmen and specially suffered hignomy from the baker would know as sooner OR later it *must* come to a man in possession. You can always tell one with half an eye. There's a reg'ler family look about 'em. I've seen many, and I knows 'em at a glance. He-hem! (UNCLE BOOTLE *starts, and breaks china ornament.*)

UNCLE. What the—look here, what you've made me do whoever you are.

SARAH. (*aside*) What manners!

UNCLE. I've smashed that china figure.

SARAH. Never mind—*I've* fetched him one or two cracks before now. He's used to it.

UNCLE. *You!* Excuse me, but how did you come in? I ask because this house, is, as it were, *mine* for the present.

SARAH. (*aside*) *His'n* as it were! I knew I was right about him. (*To him*) Well, you see, when I went out this morning I took the key away with me by accidents.

UNCLE. When you went out this morning? (*Aside*) Here's more of them. (*To her*) You'll excuse me, but there appear to be several *residents* in this house, but as yet I haven't come across anything in the shape of a servant.

SARAH. No! Ain't you seen old Grubbins?

UNCLE. Old Grubbins? No Who's he?

SARAH. It's not a *nim*, it's a *ner*. She goes out *chairing*

UNCLE. *Chairing! Mending* 'em?

SARAH. No! The idea of *you*, "a man in possession," making believe not to know what *chairing is!*

UNCLE. (*aside*) A man in possession! Well, she's not altogether wrong. (*To her*) So, my dear, ha! ha! I'm—I'm a man in possession, eh?

SARAH. Of course. And you *looks* it.

UNCLE. (*aside*) Hem! And if I'm the man in possession (*edging to her*) ha! ha! what—what are *you*, eh—eh?

SARAH. (*aside*) They're all loving in their way, specially the old ones.

UNCLE. What's *your* particular occupation here?

SARAH. Nothink; I were 'ousemaid. (*Aside*) Gin'ral servant sounds so ungenteel.

UNCLE. Housemaid, eh?

SARAH. Yes. I left this morning, and I've come to take away my box.

UNCLE. Oh! indeed, and your name—

SARAH. Sarah Jane Beanfield, and no cause to disown it.

UNCLE. Now, between ourselves, Sarah Jane Beanfield, I should like to learn a little about your master.

SARAH. Which *late* master is the word, please.

UNCLE. I beg your pardon. LATE master. You mean he used to come in at all hours, I suppose. Door always left on the latch, I presume.

SARAH. Latch! Not it! Catch missis allowing the door to be left on the latch!

UNCLE. Missis? Did I understand you to say missis? *What* missis? *Whose* missis?

SARAH. Nobody's, now I've left.

UNCLE. (*excitedly*) What do you mean?

SARAH. (*aside*) How he rolls his eyes! It's a blessing Haugustus is in the yall.

UNCLE. (*aside*) There's something awful coming, I'm certain. (*To her*) You don't mean to say that Mr. Beaumont—your late master's—

SARAH. Married! *Ain't* he, though. There ain't no more marrieder man in *this* neighborhood.

UNCLE. (*aside*) Let me be calm. (*To her*) Where is the lady?

SARAH. She *were* in when I left this morning. Probulay gone to the play. They're very fond of the play, though I know they *pits* it.

UNCLE. Was—*is* she anything like *that!* (*Holding photograph to her.*)

SARAH. *Like* that! That's 'ER.

UNCLE. Mrs. ——

SARAH. Mrs. Beaumont, of course.

UNCLE. Then—who's—who's Fletcher?

SARAH. Who's Fletcher? (*Nudges him*) Go along with yer. "Who's Griffiths?"

UNCLE. (*aside*) An extraordinary, a horrible suspicion overwhelms me! (*Suddenly seizes* SARAH *violently by the arm, and brings her a little down*) Woman! Sarah Jane Cornfield.

SARAH. (*alarmed*) Beanfield! Which also my cousing's in the yall.

UNCLE. Cousin me no cousins! Answer me, and answer me truly, Sarah Jane Brickfield—remember, your *box* is still on the premises, *and*, as the man in possession, I tell you you shall not *remove* that box until you have—(*fiercely and hoarsely*)—*told me more!*

SARAH. (*alarmed*) You wouldn't keep back a poor girl's—

UNCLE. Keep back nothing from *me* then, Sarah Jane.

SARAH. (*quickly*) Bean—

UNCLE. (*quickly*) Field! Had these Beaumonts any relations?

SARAH. Yes, Mrs. Beaumont has a mar—and I've heard —quite accidental, because I'd scorn to listen—

UNCLE. Go on!

SARAH. I've heard as master had married unbeknown to his uncle abroad.

UNCLE. (*ferociously*) Ha! ha!

SARAH. And his uncle must never know it, or he'd cut him off.

UNCLE. So he would. So he would. What did he say that uncle was LIKE, eh, eh?

SARAH. Master said as he was a ugly little old feller as lived on 'ot pickles and curry powder, kep' his bed and couldn't see a hole through a *sieve!*

UNCLE. Ha! ha! (*Lets her go*) For the first time for many a long year, Barnaby Bootle, you've been *done*. But tell me, *who*—who IS Fletcher?

SARAH. I think I have heard his name mentioned, some old friend of master's.

UNCLE. Enough. Fetch your box. Stay! Here's half-a-sovereign. Till you're off the premises hold your tongue.

SARAH. I'll *try* to. (*Aside*) If he ain't the queerest man in possession *I* ever see. Catch me leaving the premises. I'll git my box out, and then see what's a-going on. (*Exit.*)

UNCLE. Duped! done! tricked, befooled, and laughed at. Wait a bit, Paul Beaumont, and Mrs. Beaumont, too, and friendly but mendacious Fletcher also. WAIT a bit, my tricksey trio. (*Goes up and off.*)

Enter MRS. BEAUMONT, *followed by* BEAUMONT, *hastily.*

MRS. B. This is a climax. Making love to this Miss Whatever-her-name-is. Oh! your uncle *saw* you.

BEAUMONT. No, he didn't. For he couldn't. I don't know the lady's *name* even.

MRS. B. Rubbish! The *restaurant* was bad enough.

BEAUMONT. *Many* of them are.

MRS. B. And the kicking at Twickenham, and—

BEAUMONT. You are barking up the wrong tree.

MRS. B. Oh! save your vulgar Americanisms for Miss Whatever-her-name-is. After confessing everything to your uncle.

BEAUMONT. I haven't confessed a word.

MRS. B. You haven't confessed a word. After you said you'd go and confess *at once?* Then he doesn't know?

BEAUMONT. Of course not.

MRS. B. Then my supposed husband—

BEAUMONT. Was Fletcher, of course. Now don't you feel small?

MRS. B. And he still—

BEAUMONT. Fancies you're Mrs. Fletcher, of course. And we must keep up the hideous deception till he leaves by the forty-five past nine. (*Looks at watch*) The fatal—I mean joyful hour approaches.

MRS. B. O Paul! dear Paul—I suspected you wrongfully.

BEAUMONT. (*injured*) You're *always* doing so, Teresina.

MRS. B. Forgive me, Paul; do *please* forgive me.

BEAUMONT. (*dignified*) Hem! You may kiss me, Teresina.

MRS. B. Thank you, Paul. (*Moves toward him.*)

Enter UNCLE BOOTLE.

UNCLE. Halloa! halloa! Interrupting a little *tête-à-tête*, eh? (*Aside to* MRS. BEAUMONT) Quite right. Show *your* husband *you* can do a little flirtation on your own account. Tit for tat.

Enter FLETCHER *and* EMILY. MRS. BEAUMONT *goes to* EMILY *and talks.*

FLETCHER. Beaumont, your early peas are prime. Promise to be nearly as good as those at the greengrocer's, and I suppose not *much* more than double the price.

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) What a consoling way Fletcher has with him. Well, Fletcher, nice place, isn't it? (*Aside to* FLETCHER) Say it isn't.

FLETCHER. No, don't think so.

UNCLE. Jolly in the early morning, I should say.

BEAUMONT. (*aside to* FLETCHER) Say it's beastly.

FLETCHER. No, it's awfully misty and damp in the morning.

UNCLE. Why, I thought you only came to-day.

BEAUMONT. Oh! dear, no; been here a week. He's quite right about the damp.

UNCLE. Well, I don't object to a little moisture after being parched for years. Paul, old boy, I've made up my mind to stay.

BEAUMONT. To stay—a— (*All rather stumped.*)

UNCLE. Yes. You're not deaf. To stay. You can put me anywhere. My night's rest's only a sham. I'm awake nearly all the time. And I walk about a good deal. Make up for it in the afternoon, you know. Habit—all habit.

Turns aside; the four others put their heads together, and in a low tone express their annoyance and difficulty. As UNCLE BOOTLE *cries "Hem!" they all separate, and try to appear unconcerned.*

UNCLE. (*aside*) Barnaby Bootle, old boy, your turn's come *now*.

EMILY. But *I* can't stay; Aunt Nabbs will wonder what's become of me.

FLETCHER. Oh! I can see you to the train. You're only two stations off. It goes at forty-five minutes past nine, you said.

BEAUMONT. (*eagerly*) Yes, that's *your* train, uncle. You'll all three go together. That'll be *very* pleasant, won't it?

UNCLE. (*aside to* MRS. BEAUMONT) You don't mean to say you'll let him take that young woman home?

MRS. B. But he'll come *back* again.

BEAUMONT. Oh! yes, don't you see, he'll come BACK again.

UNCLE. (*aside to* BEAUMONT) Of course he will; but reflect, his wife can't very well be left here—a—two bachelors like you and *me*, you know—*appearances*, you know.

BEAUMONT. But you're going, too.

UNCLE. That would make it *worse*—hem! *One* bachelor. (*Grins.*)

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) If he grins like that I must hurt him.

UNCLE. But I'm *not* going.

BEAUMONT. (*shouts*) We've nowhere to put you!

UNCLE. (*loudly*) Then go and sleep out!

BEAUMONT. Besides, your watch is slow. Mine tells me it's thirty minutes past *now*. My watch hasn't varied a minute for forty years, and it's twenty minutes to the station.

EMILY. (*to* FLETCHER) What *will* Aunt Nabbs say? I must walk if there's no fly to be got. It's five miles, but

I'm not afraid of a walk, especially in the cool of the evening.

FLETCHER. And I shall be with you, and the five miles won't seem *two*. (*Aloud*) Well, Teresina, I'd better *see* Miss Montrose to Upper Norwood.

MRS. B. Certainly, dear; of course, you must.

UNCLE. Nothing of the sort. Here, Paul, where's your manners? *You* must see the young lady home, of course. I *insist* upon it, and if the sky *does* look a little threatening, never mind—*I'll lend you my overcoat.*

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) A five-mile walk, and I suppose it's the same distance back. I can tell by my favorite corn it's going to be a pouring night. And that fascinating blackguard, Fletcher, left—a—

UNCLE. You'd better start at once. Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher and self will have a game at whist. I'll take dummy; you needn't bother about the key. *I'll* sit up for you.

Moves aside, talking to MRS. BEAUMONT.

BEAUMONT. (*to* FLETCHER *and* EMILY, *excitedly, aside. To* EMILY) *You* mustn't go. Nobody must go. You must send a messsage to your Aunt Nabbs, saying you find Mrs. Beaumont an old school-fellow, and you're going to stay to-night.

FLETCHER. But who's to take it?

BEAUMONT. *You*, Fletcher, *you*. You're a pedestrian, *I* am *not*.

FLETCHER. Well, I can't desert you, Paul; I—a—wait a minute.

Exits, abruptly.

BEAUMONT. (*to* UNCLE) Fletcher's insisted on going himself, and this young lady, old school-fellow of—a—

UNCLE. But he'll do the walk there and back in little over two hours. We'll all sit up for him. (*Talks aside to* EMILY.)

BEAUMONT. (*aside to* MRS. BEAUMONT. *Melodramatically*) The awful hour has come. You must leave me with him. I must confess all and trust to his better nature. India has absorbed his liver but possibly left him a remnant of heart. *If* he turns his back upon us—

MRS. B. (*cheerfully*) Even *that* is preferable to the front view.

BEAUMONT. (*grasping her hand*) Bless you, Teresina, bless you.

EMILY. (*aside*) I wonder where Peter is.

MRS. B. (*aside to her*) I hear him talking to some one in the hall. Let's leave uncle and nephew together, there'll be *such* a scene.

EMILY. I declare I'm so bewildered, I—a—where IS Peter? (*They exit quickly.*)

UNCLE *and* NEPHEW *are on opposite sides. The* UNCLE *has his back to* BEAUMONT—*looking at book of photographs.*

UNCLE. Pretty collection of beauties you've got *here*, only fools are photographed. Bah! A conspiracy between nature and art to show you up.

BEAUMONT. (*after an effort grasps his* UNCLE'S *arm and brings him forward*) Uncle—*dear* uncle.

UNCLE. Hulloa!

BEAUMONT. Uncle Bootle, the time has arrived when I feel I can no longer conceal from you a terrible and painful fact.

UNCLE (*aside*) Ha! ha! I knew it must come.

BEAUMONT. Before condemning the accused unheard, listen to the few feverish sentences that rise, despite my better judgment, to my—a—a—

UNCLE. Lips.

BEAUMONT. Thank you, lips. And picture to yourself the position of a man who meeting by accident his destiny, I say his *inevitable* destiny, at Margate—

UNCLE. Rubbish! Destinies don't go to Margate.

BEAUMONT. This particular destiny *did*. Picture to yourself a young couple, single-souled, heart free, romantic, enthusiastic—with similar tastes.

UNCLE. Just so—*both* fond of shrimps. No novelty that.

BEAUMONT. Sharing the same aspirations, knowing no pleasure apart (*rhapsodically*), wretched asunder—happy only when side by side, dreaming of the indefinite, and dimly realizing the impossible!

UNCLE. Very nice way of getting through the time. Almost as jolly as driving over to Pegwell Bay.

BEAUMONT. Uncle—Uncle Bootle—you—you have no romance.

UNCLE. (*walking up*) Haven't I? HAVEN'T I, Paul Beaumont? Do you think *I*—in early life—didn't know what it was to be dazed—to dream and doubt and be deceived! Do you think because you see me here a dried-up old pepper-box, a dilapidated jar of preserved ginger—a valetudinarian Chili—a superannuated mass of mulligatawney! *No*, sir. *I* once had aspirations—I once had hopes of happi-

ness, but they were doomed to be dashed to the ground, even as the priceless blue china of the cormorant-like collector falls into fragments from the careless clutch of the neglectful housemaid. (*Blows his nose violently.*)

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) He *has* a heart. I will get at it, but not direct—the route must be *via* Fletcher. (*To him*) Uncle —you—you have seen the young couple who are domiciled for the day or so beneath this roof. I blush down to my heels as I think of the deception—

UNCLE. What—what do you mean, sir? Not a word against that young woman. I admire her, I respect her, and—and—

BEAUMONT. And she is not Fletcher's wife.

UNCLE *staggers back.*

BEAUMONT. (*aside*) Ruat cœlum! That's to say, if the ceiling likes to come down, *let* it.

UNCLE. Not—not Fletcher's wife?

BEAUMONT. No, sir.

UNCLE. *No*, sir! OH! sir! SO, sir! You knowing my severely moral principles have—

BEAUMONT. Dear uncle, it was to save those very identical high-pressure extra double distilled moral principles a *shock* that I was induced to represent Fletcher as the husband of *my*—I mean *his*—I mean as married. Knowing that finding a young lady and a young gentleman on familiar terms in another person's house might irritate your severely sensitive cuticle, we concocted this innocent deception, hoping—I mean *thinking*—your visit would only be for an hour or two. Don't glare so, Uncle Bootle—*please* don't glare so! (*Aside*) He's sure to go now, and I can send him the rest by post.

UNCLE. (*not unpleasantly*) Now, hang *me* if I haven't suspected this all along.

BEAUMONT. (*delighted*) You have! (*Aside*) He doesn't glare! He has found us out, and will forgive us.

UNCLE. You have accused me of a want of romance. Nothing of the kind; I'm full of it. It would have engulfed and swamped me, had I not enveloped myself in an antimatrimonial crust. But you will see I have still the feelings of youth. Mrs. Fletcher is *not* Mrs. Fletcher. From the first moment I met her, I felt fascinated. I'm positively certain she's struck with me. I'll propose to her this evening, and if she accepts me, I'll marry her to-morrow.

BEAUMONT. You don't know what you're talking about?

UNCLE. *She* will. I can settle a hundred thousand upon any woman I make Mrs. Bootle!

BEAUMONT. But what's to become of *me?*

UNCLE. Assist me, and you sha'n't suffer. Thwart me, and I'll cut you off with a *shilling*—yes, sir, a shilling, and not free of legacy duty. Don't say a word. I'll put the matter before her eyes at *once*. Don't stare. Do you think I'm a hundred? Sixty-seven next birthday, and was taken for forty-six only last Saturday. Forty-SIX, sir, and when my back's to the light I don't look *that!* (*Exit.*)

BEAUMONT. There's nothing for us but to fly—the lot of us, and lock this old lunatic up in the house. I certainly—(*sees* SARAH, *who enters*) Halloa! What the deuce do *you* want?

SARAH. Haugustus, my cousing, which I left him in the yall, and he have vanished. And hoping bye-gones will be bye-gones, I must say as I'm sorry to see you've got a man in possession.

BEAUMONT. What do you mean?

SARAH. And a essentric party he is, and very pleasant; we could have got on together, if I'd stayed.

BEAUMONT. (*seizing her*) Sarah! Again, what do you mean! That little old gentleman's my uncle. What have you been saying to him?

SARAH. Your uncle! O heavens! then I've told him all!

BEAUMONT. All what, you miserable maid-of-all-work?

SARAH. All about your being married and being afraid of your uncle, and your saying he lived on curry and hot pickles, and a sieve was too much for his eyesight.

BEAUMONT. Wretched woman! I said a cullender. Ha! ha! ha! And in the teeth of this he wants to marry his niece-in-law. No! no! no! I see it all! He's playing with me, torturing me, and it serves me right. (*Turns fiercely on* SARAH, *who jumps back*) Sarah! You have ruined me. You have destroyed the hopes of—

Enter UNCLE *with* MRS. BEAUMONT *on his arm*, EMILY *and* FLETCHER *at another entrance.*

UNCLE. It's all right, my boy, she's accepted me.

BEAUMONT. (*livid*) Old man! I have every respect for your gray hairs—at least I *should* have if you had any—in your absence I revere that bald but boldly developed brow. BUT, Uncle Boot'e—I must—

FLETCHER. (*jerks him round to himself sharply.* BEAUMONT *nearly losing his balance*) It's all right. The long

party in the hall has gone with the letter to Aunt Nabbs. Everything's smooth enough at last. (*Slaps him on the back.*)

EMILY. Yes, Mr. Beaumont, and though your wife and I are *not* old school-fellows I trust we shall always be the best of friends, in fact we're quite *fond* of each other, are we *not*, dear?

MRS. B. Oh! very much so *indeed*, love. (*They talk aside.*)

FLETCHER *and* BEAUMONT *are in the front a little apart.*

BEAUMONT. Fletcher, will you oblige me by explaining?

UNCLE. (*coming between them and taking each of their arms*) Suppose we none us us explain anything. You've behaved very badly, my boy, but I'm not the old monster you imagine. You've suffered sufficiently in a small way. Take my advice, be open for the future. Fletcher, don't you flirt so much; it's bad for your complexion. Teresina, my dear, look to little temper. Miss Emily—that's *your* department. (*To* FLETCHER) Suppose somebody suggests supper.

SARAH. Which excuse me, but I can't go home without my cousing's pertection, so—

MRS. B. So you'd better stay, Sarah.

SARAH. And if so be as a lobster, purchased permiscous, and biled recent, would be acceptable, here's one as Haugustus has left in the yall as him and me were going to have for supper.

BEAUMONT. Good. I hope he hasn't been sitting on it *much.*

UNCLE. (*taking it*) I haven't looked a lobster in the face for years.

BEAUMONT. Well, never mind, let bye-gones be bye-gones and have supper, at which, if you will only give us the pleasant sauce of your approval, I don't care how often I commit matrimony and risk the remorseless rancour of dear old

"UNCLE"

CURTAIN

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